7: Thompson--375 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
116, 489, 503, 653

"The Mekong was the only means of communication with Cochin-Chinese seaports. The subsidy accorded to the Compagnie des Messagéries Fluviales to improve its navigation of the Mekong was too high for the colony's budget, yet inadequate for the work it had to do. Hundreds of thousands of francs were lost in acquiring a knowledge of these problems and in training a personnel. Mekong boats must reckon on three periods of navigation. In low water there are no less than eight trans-shipments between Phnom-Penh and Luang-Prabang, by rail and by road, both of which were expensive and difficult to build because of the shifting surface of the land. Mid-season is the best for navigation, since high water means contending with a terrible current. Laos is desperately in need of railroads, and it has fewer than any other country in the Union. Every Governor, from Doumer on, has had railroad projects, but they have always been laid aside for other works. The recent realization of Laos's mineral wealth through journalistic propaganda has been counteracted by the depression; yet once again there is promise to fill this crying need, notably Robin's impetus to road-building in 1935-6. Unless this is soon done, Laotian commerce will escape permanently to Bangkok. Contraband can never be controlled along the great watery frontier, and Siam's comparatively duty-free imports and cheap railroad and boat transportation will always have the advantage."

10: d'Orleans--358-360 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos-1-2
116, 439, 489, 177.43

"Though the natural products of Luang Prabang are so varied, the cost of transport over so long a distance from the coast would reduce the profits very considerably, though I think that the complaints of the Chinese traders as to business being carried on at a loss must be an exaggeration, for if so why do they carry it on?

In any event, it is difficult to form a precise estimate of the commerce of the principality. According to the Siamese the exports from the Laos region, which includes the country between Strung Treng and Xiangsen in one direction, and Xieng Mai and Attopen in the other, amount to about £900,000, and if this estimate is correct the proportion of Luang Prabang must be very small. Macey gives the exports of benzoin at £40,000, but if this was so at one time the total must have decreased very much.

But trifling as the commercial movement of Luang Prabang may be, it is of interest to us, because of the situation of the town upon the Mekong, nearly in the centre of the Laos and in the vicinity of Tonkin, to see what share we may hope to have in it and what profit can be derived from it. Opinions vary very much upon the subject, and Mr. Archer, the British Consul, whose statistical reports as to the trade of this region are well worth careful study, is of opinion that there is little to fear from French competition, the cost of transport being too great, and with regard to steam navigation, he does not deem it possible upon the Mekong, on account of the rapids upon the other [359] hand. I have read several articles in the Bangkok Times to the effect that the French have great facilities for getting into their hands all trade upon the Mekong, and that to guard against this

Siam ought to push on the construction of railways with all speed. Then, again, Mr. Macey and Captain Devrez assert that the Tonkin routes are much shorter, easier, and less expensive than those leading to Bangkok.

Whatever the truth may be, of one thing I can speak positively, and that is that the greater part of the commercial current of Luang Prabang either comes from or goes to Bangkok. This current follows one of two routes. It either proceeds from Luang Prabang to Paklay by the Mekong; Paklay to Pitchai or Ontaradit by land and from thence to Bangkok down the Menam (this being the way by which we returned), a voyage of twenty-six days going down and fifty-two coming up. The second route is from Luang Prabang to Nong Kay by the Mekong; from Nong Kay to Korat and from Korat to Bangkok, this being rather the longer of the two. These routes, though shorter than that which brings Luang Prabang and Tonquin within a month of each other, have the advantage of being safer both by water and by land, there being no rapids on the Menam, while the roads are wide enough for elephants to travel easily along them and might easily have rails laid down. Owing to the facility of the communications, the cost of transport between Luang Prabang and Bangkok is if not cheaper, at all events not dearer than those via the Black River, and as I have been over the two routes myself I am in a [360] position to make the comparison. M. Massie, moreover, has arrived at the same conclusion."

25: Brodrick--85 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians
116, 131, 489, 177.48 France
636.48

"The Laos was, and indeed still is, a country happy in its isolation. It is land quite difficult of access. There are no railways. There is only one all-weather road crossing the country and that in the Lower Laos. Moreover, in my day, at least, that is to say on the very eve of the last World War, you did not just start off for the Laos as you would for any other part of Indo-China, discreet inquiries were made. The French liked to keep their Laos uncontaminated by foreigners.(1)

1. The total area of the Laos is just under 90,000 square miles and the population, at the last census, was just over one million. There is no all-weather road right up the Mekong Valley and the highways from the east cannot be used during the rains except for that across the Lower Laos from Dong-Ha to Kabao. Much of the Laos is, therefore, except for air-communication, cut off from the outer world for at least five months out of every year."

68: Mouhot--125 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 231, 489, 492

"In all this mountainous region [HD: i.e. from Korat in Siam north to Luang Prabang] elephants are the only means of transport. Every village possesses some, several as many as fifty or a hundred. Without this intelligent animal no communication would be possible during seven months of the year, while, with his assistance, there is scarcely a place to which you cannot penetrate."

68: Mouhot--126-129 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 231, 489, 492

"We must not, however, exaggerate his merits. Probably the saddles used by the Laotians are capable of great improvement; but I must admit that the load of three small oxen, that is to say, about 250 or 300 pounds, is all that I ever saw the largest elephants carry easily, and 18 miles is the longest distance they can accomplish with an ordinary load. Ten or twelve miles are the usual day's work. With four, five, or sometimes seven elephants, I travelled over all the mountain country from the borders of Laos to Louang-Prabang, a distance of nearly 500 miles.

All this eastern portion, with the exception of a few villages filled with 'black-bellied savages'--so called from the manner in which they tattoo themselves--is inhabited by the same race, the 'white-bellied Laotians,' who call themselves Laos, and are known by this name to all the Siamese, Chinese, and surrounding nations. [127-128 contain illustration] [129]

The black-bellied or western Laotians are called by their eastern brethren by the same name which, in Siam and Cambodia, is bestowed on the Annamites, Zuène, Lao-Zuène. The only thing that distinguishes them is, that they tattoo the under part of the body, principally the thighs, and frequently wear the hair long and knotted on the top of their heads. Their language is nearly the same, and differs little from the Siamese and Eastern Laos, except in the pronunciation, and in certain expressions no longer in use among the former."

68: Mouhot--135-136 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 361, 489, 133

"On the 24th of June [HD: 1861] I arrived at Paklaie, lat. 19° 16'58", the first small town on my northward route. It is situated on the Mekon, and is a charming place; the inhabitants seem well off; the houses elegant and spacious,--larger, indeed, than I have seen before in this country; and everything betokens a degree of prosperity which I have also remarked wherever I have stopped since. The Mekon at this place is much larger than the Menam at Bangkok, and forces its way between the lofty mountains with a noise resembling the roaring of the sea and the impetuosity of a torrent, seeming scarcely able to keep within its bed. There are many rapids between Paklaie and Louang Prabang, which is ten or fifteen days' painful travelling.

I was tired of my long journey on elephants, and was [136] anxious to hire a boat here, but the chief and some of the inhabitants, fearing that I might meet with some accident, advised me to continue my route by land. I therefore proceeded as far as Thadua, ninety miles farther north, and during eight days passed through much the same style of country as before, changing one valley for another, and crossing mountains which became more and more elevated, and being more than ever annoyed by the leeches. We were, however, no longer compelled to sleep in the jungle, for every evening we reached some hamlet or village, where we found shelter either in a pagoda or caravanserai."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

o oo we sneaked past we could see a bonfire with a group silhouetted round it. Our passing appeared to go quite unnoticed.

We reached Muong Kassy about two hours later and slept in a large, barn-like Laotian building of thatch and bamboo, which served as the officers' mess. Insects had been at the bamboo and the slightest movement filled the air with a powder which had the effect of snuff. The building swayed slightly with each step, but no more when there were twenty occupants, as there were next day, than when there were only two.

u 89 Muong Kassy was the headquarters of a company of Engineers
7/2 whose job was the upkeep of the bridges. They were uncomfortably isolated here on top of a small hill rising only partially free of the forests, with magnificent views in all directions, which nobody noticed any longer. There was no doctor, so that casualties of any kind might have to wait several weeks for a convoy going in any direction. In the rainy season, when roads and bridges disappeared, the garrison was confined to barracks for five or six months. Outside the stockades the usual straggling collection of Laotian and
[273] Chinese huts had formed, with saloons selling 'shoum', a fire-water made from maize. Everything was brought by convoy and was in short supply, except the shoum which was a local speciality. The store-keepers also had a stock of what was described in English on the label as 'fruit tonic'. The fruit tonic was made in Siam and was probably an industrial by-product; but the garrison had found out that shoum plus fruit tonic was more effective than either separately, and that stunned by a good stiff early morning dose of this, the day's boredoms could be better supported. A shoum-and-
o oo fruit-tonic relaxed the nerves too. It was after we had been introduced to this Muong Kassy custom that Dupont changed his plans, and quite forgetting about his pregnant wife, and the bicycle she might succeed in putting together, he said we would stay the day, and leave next morning.

Taking a guide from the camp, we went for a dip in the river.

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

INTO THE MEO COUNTRY

489 It was fitting that at Luang Prabang the impetus of travel should
509 have spent itself. Not even convoys ever came as far as this. Groups of unfortunate men occasionally set off on foot and walked for as long as three weeks through jungle trails to relieve isolated posts. Other arrivals and departures were by a weekly D.C.3 plying between Luang Prabang and Vientiane. It was booked up well ahead.

505 Down at the riverside the story was much the same as at Vientiane. There were pirogues which supposedly made regular journeys, but no one was prepared to commit himself to positive information about them. One authority went so far as to say that it was out of the question to hope to travel north by pirogue because the river was too low at this time of the year. I had just thanked him when the engine of what looked like a totally abandoned hulk, lying in an oily pool not far away, suddenly burst into wheezy activity. One of the crew of two said that they would be leaving in half an hour. Bound for where? — Vientiane? No . . . Xieng
701 Khong — for the unnavigable north, of course. All the space had been reserved for a body of ex-pirates who had changed sides and had now, it was said, demanded to be sent back to fight their former allies.

While I was slowly piecing together this jig-saw of information in pidgin-French, the brand-new patriots arrived for embarkation; a most apathetic looking body of men. In their ill-fitting uniforms they were standardized; deprived of individuality by a common factor of misery, an ingrained habit of expressionless stoicism. Silently they filed up the gang-plank and filled the dim interior of the pirogue. It was difficult to believe that the fire of conviction burned in any of these breasts, and I felt sorry for the French N.C.O. who was being sent back in charge.

000 But Monsieur Leveau said that there would also be a pirogue going south one day, and to save me from being victimized by Chinese cat-and-mouse tactics he sent for the owner and asked him when the boat would leave. With gentle satisfaction the Chinese

489 [432] 3. The excessive distance to be traversed before any port is reached, and the consequent impossibility of effecting transactions on time in natural products with a variable market price, such as cardamom, among others.

4. Excessive customs exit duties and local taxes.

The above is an impartial exposé of the situation of the commercial trading post of Vien-Tiane, according to the very statements of the men who founded it. Yet in spite of everything these young traders have not lost courage. They hope for a better future which can perhaps be anticipated the day when some of the innovations of which we shall speak in what follows have become an accomplished fact (1).

(1) See same chapter, Art. 7 and Chapter X, Art. 4.

4. EXPORTS

439 Although the various products which constitute the exportable merchandise of Laos have already been examined, we present them here once again with certain complementary information on their value, importance, origin and destination. The figures contained in the following tables are to be regarded as a minimum (2) for exports

(2) In fact, many products are exported from Laos without their exit being officially recognized.

in 1898 and 1899.

I LOWER LAOS (3)

(3) We refer here only to exports from Lower Laos, since there is not sufficient information to be able to establish similar tables for Upper Laos. Further on, however, we shall give the total exports from Upper Laos for 1898.

A) Merchandise

		1898	1899
Total exports	Weight	1,281T	498,415T
	Value	442,629F	405,942F

439 These imports chiefly involve the following goods: spun cotton, spun silk, native cotton goods, printed sampots, absinthe, salt, copper pots, etc.

One should also remember the imports by way of the River Merchant Fleet [Messageries fluviales] which are destined for the administration or for Europeans, and which amount to 9,233 cases of goods weighing about 300 tons.

In addition to the foregoing, salt is imported into southern Laos by the Cochinchina excise office at three depots, Stung-Treng, Khong and Ban-Mouang. Between October 1898 and February 1899, 120 tons of salt were sold to the inhabitants at a price lower than that which they ordinarily paid.

If we compare the figure for imports with that for exports, we note that in 1899 imports amounted to 92,017 francs as against exports of 847,662 francs, or a figure nearly ten times greater.

This discrepancy is even greater than is indicated, for the total value of exports is reckoned on the average purchase price in the country of origin, and should surely be doubled to obtain the average sale price on the nearby markets of Siam, Cambodia and Cochinchina. This difference between imports and exports results from the fact that the greater part of the imported merchandise does not enter Laos by [441] French routes, but comes in through the back door by way of Bassac, Oubone, Lakhone, Nong-Khay, Paklay, Xieng-Khong, Luang-Prabang, etc.

To sum up, we cannot with any certainty give any figure for overall trade in all of Laos. If, however, we take as a basis the averages obtained in various provinces, it may be presumed that this trade represents somewhat more than two million francs, to wit:

Exports.....1,244,989 francs (1)

(1) A figure obtained by adding the total exports of Upper and Lower Laos for 1898, according to the above tables.

Imports (3/4 of exports).... 933,741 francs
2,178,730 francs

439 489 6. MEANS OF TRANSPORT USED. COMPARISON BETWEEN TRANSPORT COSTS ON VARIOUS TRADE ROUTES FROM LAOS TO THE SEA.

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A) Means of transport used

1. BY LAND. The means of transport used on land routes include men, elephants, horses, mules, oxen and oxcarts.

482 Men. A man serving as a bearer may carry his burden in three different ways, depending on the race to which he belongs and the route he must follow, whether over plains or mountains.

a) On the back. This manner of carrying burdens is used by all mountainfolk in general, Thais, Khas and others. Women and children as well as men carry burdens which are naturally in proportion to their strength. In transports, the average load for one bearer is thirty kilograms.

b) With a bamboo pole, the load being distributed at both ends. Two baskets, two packs or two cases are fastened to the extremities of a light, fairly thick bamboo pole which is about 1.5 meters long. The bearer places the middle of the pole on his shoulder and balances the load with his hand. The weight of the load thus carried will vary between 24 and 30 kilograms. This way of carrying loads is used by the [442] Burmese, the Lus, the Youns, the northern Laotians and some Khas.

c) With a bamboo pole, the load being suspended in the middle. This method of transport requires two men, one at each end of a bamboo pole about two meters long. It is difficult by this means to carry a load greater than 15 to 20 kilograms per man, or 30 to 40 kilograms per pole. This method of transport is used in the plains regions by the Laotians, Thais and other inhabitants of valleys and plateaus. A bearer can cover an average distance of 25 kilometers per day in level country, and from 15 to 20 in mountainous regions.

Carrying loads on one's head, which meets with such favor in Africa, is not a method used in Laos.

492 Elephants. Depending on its age, size and energy, an elephant can carry loads varying between 100 and 190 kilograms. But it is a delicate animal and requires great care and rather frequent rest periods.

On the other hand, it can go anywhere, even in spots where horses and even men would be halted. The elephant's step is regular on uneven terrain as well as in flat regions. The average distance covered in a day is from 18 to 25 kilometers, depending on the nature of the terrain and the temperature.

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[447] Current transport costs are generally as follows:

Land Routes	francs
By human bearer, per hundred kilograms and per day:	1.90 to 2
By elephant, " " " " " "	1.60 to 1.80
By pack-horse, " " " " " "	1.90 to 2
By pack-ox, " " " " " "	0.70 to 0.80

By referring to what has been said above, we may deduce, for each of these methods of transport, the following average cost per ton or per kilometer:

By human bearer:	0.76 to 0.80 francs
By elephant:	1.07 to 1.20 "
By pack-horse:	0.76 to 0.80 "
By pack-ox:	0.70 to 0.80 "

Boatmen. Boatmen may be hired by the day or by contract for a given journey. The current prices are 0.375 franc per man per day without rice, and 0.30 franc with food.

Coolie bearers. Coolie bearers are generally paid 0.25 franc per man and per day without food, or 0.20 franc with rice.

Chief coolies and chief pirogue boatmen. The chief coolies and chief pirogue boatmen, pilots, etc. are always paid higher than their men. The amount of increase will vary, depending on conditions, by fifty to a hundred percent.

Pirogue rental. Renting a pirogue usually costs the same price per day as hiring a boatman. Thus the cost of renting a pirogue and hiring four boatmen is reckoned on the basis of five units.

B) Comparative transport costs on various trade routes from Laos to the sea.

We have thought that it might be of interest to sum up, in the comparative table given below, the courses and costs per ton and per kilometer of transports on ten of the principal trade routes of Laos.

149: Reinach--338 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina Laotians AM8

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[448] COMPARATIVE TABLE OF TRANSPORT COSTS ON VARIOUS TRADE ROUTES FROM LAOS TO COCHINCHINA, ANNAM, TONKIN AND SIAM (AND VICE VERSA)

Courses	Means of transport	Distance in kilometers	Number of days		Price in francs		Observations
			upstream	downstream	Total per metric ton of 1000 kilograms	Per ton and per kilometer (ton-kilometer)	
I. Luang-Prabang to Saigon	By River Merchant Fleet. Steamships and pirogues	2300	50-60	30-35	162.50	0.0705	The average rate for cotton goods is taken as a basis.
II. Nong-Khay to Saigon	Same	1840	27-35	18-22	122.25	0.0664	Same.
III. Nong-Khay to Bangkok by way of Korat	Oxcarts	603	[illegible]34 to 36[illegible]		260 to 300	0.414 to 0.497	On this route prices vary from one year to the next, depending on the abundance of draft oxen, which are often decimated by epizootic disease.

149: Reinach--339 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina Laotians AM8

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COMPARATIVE TABLE OF TRANSPORT COSTS ON VARIOUS TRADE ROUTES FROM LAOS TO COCHINCHINA, ANNAM, TONKIN AND SIAM (AND VICE VERSA) [continued]

III. (continued)							In case of a rise, the prices given here should be increased by about 15 percent.
IV. Luang-Prabang to Nong-Khay	1. By River Merchant Fleet. Pirogues and rafts.	460	15 - 25	10 - 12	40	0.0861	The average rate for cotton goods is taken as a basis. Usual prices, whatever the merchandise.
	2. By free rafts. Upstream by pirogue.		18 - 25	9 -12	250	0.543	
V. Nong-Khay to Pak-Hin-Boun	1. By River Merchant Fleet. Steamships.	335	2	1-1/2	22.50	0.0673	Average rate for cotton goods taken as basis. Usual prices, for all merchandise.
	2. By rafts and free pirogues.		8-14	4-5	100	0.298	

149: Reinach--340 G-8 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochine Laotians AM8

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COMPARATIVE TABLE OF TRANSPORT COSTS ON VARIOUS TRADE ROUTES FROM LAOS TO COCHINCHINA, ANNAM, TONKIN AND SIAM (AND VICE VERSA) [continued]

VI. Pak-Hin-Boun to Haiphong via Ben-Thuy (Annam	By pirogue, elephant, sampan and steamships belonging to the Correspondances fluviales du Tonkin.	570	15-17	15-16	130 to 150	0.228 to 0.263	By pirogue from Pak-Hin-Boun to Keng-Kiet. By elephant from Keng-Kiet to Hatrai (Annam). By sampan from Hatrai to Ben-Thuy. By steamship from Ben Thuy to Haiphong.

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II. Bassac to Bangkok via Oubone and Korat.	1. Steamship from Bangkok to Pakin. 2. Carts from Pakin to Oubone. 3. Pirogues from Oubone to Bassac.	750	36	36	26.65 245 19	290.65	0.388	
I. Bassac to Saigon.	Pirogue and steamship.	1110	14	30	57.20	0.0515		

439 [450] A mere glance at the table is enough to show the enormous
• 489 difference between transport costs towards Siam, and those towards
435 Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchina. And even so, we have not reckoned with the various interior local taxes which shippers have to pay on the roads of Siam, nor evaluated the worries and bothers to which they are subject or the robberies which they must fear.

[Illustration here]

We have already expressed the opinion that if these routes continue to win favor with merchants, this is because they end at points and at markets where the latter can be sure not only of marketing their products, but also of finding at low prices all the merchandise, no matter what its source, which is necessary to the inhabitants of Laos.

Let our markets in Cochinchina, Cambodia, Annam and Tonkin be supplied in the same way and offer the merchants of Laos the same advantages in the way of reduced prices; let trading posts or factories be established on the Mekong at Stung-Treng, [451] Bassac, Lakhone, Hin-Boun, Vien-Tiane, Pak-Lay and Luang-Prabang, and the roads leading to Siam will rapidly be forsaken for our own. Indeed, all the merchants know that security now reigns in Laos. One pays what is due only once, the distances are shorter, and transport costs are lower than those paid from the Mekong to Siam.

7. CUSTOMS SYSTEM TO BE ADOPTED

434 The valley of the Mekong, of which we occupy one side, remains
651 open in fact whereas the coasts of Indo-China are closed by the customs. If we were to close this valley as well by a customs barrier we should then have contracted enormous expenditures without any hope of compensating receipts. From still another point of view, is it not to be feared that the present state of things will bring about the following result? Today, foreign merchandise is halted on our coasts by customs duties. Since such merchandise is, moreover, indispensable to our nationals, there can be no doubt but that it is coming into our possessions by a back door, despite the long distances, the high costs and the difficulties of all kinds which the roads from Siam to the Mekong offer. After flooding this basin first, it will penetrate into Cambodia, Annam and Tonkin without any profit either for the Treasury or for our nationals.

We speak in the future tense, but who can deny that we might